

Additional Comments from Labor

1.1 The National Rural Advisory Council (NRAC) was established in 1999 under the *Rural Adjustment Act 1992* (RA Act).

1.2 It was established as a statutory skills-based independent advisory council body. NRAC was to give the Minister (for Agriculture and Water Resources) independent advice and information as requested by the Minister.

1.3 On the 15 December 2014 the Government announced that as part of their smaller Government reform NRAC would merge with the Agricultural Industry Advisory Council (AIAC).

1.4 The Government is claiming that by abolishing the legislative framework which enables the establishment of NRAC it reduces work duplication. However, work agendas will only be duplicated if the Minister chooses to task both bodies with the same work program.

1.5 Labor also disputes the Government's position that NRAC was merged with AIAC, in no way does the Minister's new advisory committee resemble NRAC. AIAC is not a statutory body; it is not required to provide an annual report or to be accountable for spending costs. No former NRAC members were selected to serve on the Minister's new advisory body.

1.6 Future Governments may choose to re-establish the structure of NRAC in preference to a hand-picked advisory body by the Minister of the day.

1.7 Labor strongly supports independent bodies providing high level advice to Government undertaken with due diligence, that is also transparent and without fear or favour to the Ministers of the day.

1.8 Labor recommends that the Government amends the Omnibus Repeal Day (Spring 2015) Bill 2015 to repeal only part of the RA Act, that is, obsolete provisions relating to the Rural Adjustment Scheme and the Farm Business Improvement Program. Both programs have been superseded by new reforms for drought support as part of the Intergovernmental Agreement on National Drought Program Reform (agreed on 3 May 2013).

Recommendation 1

1.9 That the Government or Senate amend the Omnibus Repeal Day (Spring 2015) Bill 2015 to retain the legislative framework within the *Rural Adjustment Act 1992* for the establishment of the National Rural Advisory Council.

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